



# UNDERSTANDING THE IMPERATIVES OF ACCULTURATION AND JOB SATISFACTION AMONG FILIPINO NURSES IN THE SULTANATE OF OMAN

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## ABSTRACT

The Philippines is a country that has gained a global reputation for exporting nurses to other countries to fill in shortage. Deliberately or not deliberately done, the Philippine government does not only support this move, but more so, it strengthened Filipino nurses' deployment outside the country as the remittances of Overseas Filipino Workers (OFW) added a boost to the national economy. Relevant to this, their nursing academic system is highly westernized making Filipino Nurses more adept in the provision of undivided nursing care regardless of race, culture and gender. This has made Filipino nurses one of the most sought-after nurses in the global horizon. A common labor destination for Filipinos is the Middle East which includes the Sultanate of Oman. Oman is a Muslim country whose ways of life, tradition and culture is far different from that of the Philippines. It is imperative to understand acculturation and job satisfaction of Filipino nurses working [and who plan to work] in the Sultanate as these factors largely affect their job performance, physical and psychological health. A highly acculturated and satisfied nurse is a happy and a productive nurse. Finally, maintaining and grooming them relieves global nursing shortage.

### I. Philippines as a Major Exporter of Nurses in the World

The deployment of Filipino Nurses to meet the global demand and nursing shortage continues to rise. According to the statistics of the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA) released on the year 2014, registered nurses are the second largest number of deployed land-based Overseas Filipino Workers (OFW). The data reflected the steady growth of Filipino Nurses being deployed from 2010 to 2014. On the year 2010 alone, 12,082 documented Filipino Nurses left the country while on the year 2014, 19, 815 Filipino nurses were deployed to other countries. The Philippines continued to be the largest exporter of nurses in the world for the 20th century to meet global shortage for nurses especially in developed countries (Choy, 2003 as cited by Brush et al, 2004, Brush, 2010 & Choy 2010). The Filipino nurses remained to be the largest group of IENs in the United States of America (USA). Of the internationally-educated nurses (IEN) in USA, 50.1% came from the Philippines (The Registered Nurse Population, 2008).

Brush (2010) conducted an in-depth study on the history of migration of Filipino Nurses. Looking back at the history of the Philippines post-colonialization, the country was left in turmoil as it had to struggle with the devastation brought about by World War II. The administration, led by President Manuel L. Roxas, was plagued with economic hurdles in their effort to rebuild the nation with diminutive wealth. Moreover, health care issues arose as an increasing sick population with communicable diseases surfaced. The need for highly skilled nurses to meet the health demands of the nation was palpable. As such, nursing schools such as University of the Philippines opened up a sophisticated curriculum to level up the training ground for their nursing students. When President Ferdinand Marcos started his political reign in 1965, he inherited the economic difficulties of the past administration. Committed in providing a new hope for a better Philippines, he promised the Filipinos a "new society" and he implored that the nurses take an active role towards this reform. He branded the Filipino Nurses as the newest international specialty of the country by encouraging their migration to other countries to strengthen remittances and thus a stronghold of nation building. This was quickly responded by an upsurge of nursing schools and an unprecedented increase in number of nursing graduates with a nursing curriculum that is highly influenced by Western system of education and English proficiency training (Brush, 2010, pp. 1572-1579).

Intentionally or unintentionally, the Philippine government has equipped the nursing workforce with a training ground that is adept for migration (Choy, 2010, p. 15). In return, the glory that migration has brought to the lives of many Filipino nurses gained an ecstatic reputation that ignited the clamor of most Filipinos to use nursing as a stepping stone for a better future through migration. Because of the poor work conditions, weakened employability, and more importantly, minimal compensation that Filipino nurses need to endure in the Philippines despite the rigor of the nature of their job, many opt and desire to move abroad to end their plight (Brush, 2010; Semyonov & Gorodzeisky, 2005). Financial difficulties and the determination to provide a better future for their families are the most compelling reasons why Filipino nurses leave the country (Ordenez, 2012, p. 47). They can earn in one year what they will have to earn for 20 years in the Philippines (Brush, 2010). This enchanting hullabaloo for nursing continued to rise as proven by an unprecedented growth of higher education institutions (HEIs) providing nursing education in the country (Ordenez, 2012, p.47, 49). In fact, the Commission of Higher Education (CHED), the government seat responsible for monitoring the provision of quality education among HEIs, tightened their role to secure nursing education by closing down 23 nursing HEIs that are consistently low performing in the professional licensure examinations (Ordenez, 2012, p. 53).

The expanding migration and deployment of Filipino workers all over the globe has helped to raise the economy of the country through their immense remittances. According to the official data of the Philippine Statistics Office (PSO) 2014 Survey on Overseas Filipinos, total remittances of OFWs from April to September 2014 was approximated at 173.2 billion Pesos which was higher than the 162.4 worth of remittances of the previous year. OFWs were famed as the unsung heroes of the country because of this great contribution. Further, working abroad has accorded every OFW the opportunity to provide a better life for the family through stable financial sustenance. From the data of the PSO (2014), 35.2% of the recipient families were able to set aside a portion of the remittances for savings. 62.6% or six in every ten OFWs were able to set aside at least 25% of the total cash remittance. Semyonov & Gorodzeisky (2005, p.63) determined that the families of OFWs became increasingly dependent to the remittances as they heavily relied to it as the primary source of living.

With their high caliber and capabilities, it is documented how Filipino nurses remained competitive in the global arena and this reputation was a constant source of national pride. Estimo (2014) wrote in Arab News that numerous Arabs and other nationalities are appreciative of the care being rendered by Filipino Nurses in Saudi Arabia. In the news article, Wahib al Jurdi, the cardiologist of Specialized Medical Center Hospital in Riyadh, KSA praised the Filipino nurses for being caring, conscientious, charismatic and hard-working. This same appreciation has been rendered by President Obama as the White House venerated the community works of Corazon Basa Cortes Tomalinas and awarded her the honor of being a "Champion of Change"; moreover, on his State of the Union Address, he hailed another Filipino Nurse in the name of Menchu Sanchez, as a role model when she selflessly saved 20 newborns in her hospital during the Hurricane Sandy (Rueda, 2013). Indeed, the exodus of Filipino nurses to join the global labor market is strengthened by their suitable academic preparation, strong work ethics and compassion to serve and render undivided care in a transcultural setting. This makes them highly marketable and competitive candidates that are always sought-after in the global arena.

### II. The Sultanate of Oman and the Middle East as a Destination for Filipino Nurses

The Middle East is a popular destination for OFWs. The statistics from POEA (2014) showed that the top 10 destinations both for newly hired and rehired OFWs were as follows: Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Singapore, Qatar, Hong Kong, Kuwait, Taiwan, Malaysia, Bahrain and Canada. Though not ranked in the top 10, the Sultanate of Oman employed a steady incremental number of OFWs annually from 2010 with 10,955 OFWs to 15,880 OFWs in 2014 (POEA, 2014).

The Sultanate of Oman (hereafter referred to as Oman), an Arab-Muslim state geographically located in the Middle East, is considered in the past as "one of the most traditional societies in the Arab world" (Curtis, 1999 as cited by Kemp & Madsen, 2014, p.789). It is an Islamic country that is highly inclined by their cultural beliefs and traditions. It joined in coalition with five neighboring co-Arab-Muslim countries namely, United Arab Emirates (UAE), Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Kuwait and Qatar, to form the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) to boost the mutual political and economic growth of each other (Kemp & Madsen, 2014, p.789). The GCC is principally a collective society that is bonded deeply by their resilient religious ties (Mujtaba, Khanfar & Khanfar, 2009, p.175). Mujtaba, et al (2009, p.178) denoted that Omanis value unity, relationship and tasks as influenced by their Arab-Islam (cultural-religious) orientation. They maintain close family ties and keep lasting relationships with friends, colleagues and loved-ones (p.178). They give high regard to societal hierarchies that are dic-

tated by wealth, age and tribal orientation (p.178). There is a clear demarcation of authority lines and decisions are usually practiced in a top-to-bottom style (p.178).

In a study by Katou, Budhwar, Woldu & Al Hamadi (2010), they emphasized that social elite, beliefs, values and norms, and religion play the most important role in shaping human resource management (HRM) in Oman. Further, high predictability of preference is given to national institutions primarily (1) administrative establishments e.g. Ministry of Legal Affairs, Court of Legal Administration and Court of the Royal Diwan, (2) labor laws and labor markets, (3) Omanization program and (4) Sharia Law which is a fundamental source of Islamic Law after the Quran, in forming HRM in the country. The Islamic culture and tradition is more than a way of life in Oman as it penetrates social, political and economic aspects of the country.

According to the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI), Oman has reached a total population of 4,254,416 at the end of September 2015 with a growth rate of 0.7 percent from the previous month. Of this, 55.6% are Omanis with a population of 2,365,937 while 44.4% represents the expatriate population at 1,888,479 (Times of Oman, 2015). This data shows that nearly half of the total population living in the country is expatriates. The highest percentage of expatriates is Indians, followed by Bangladeshis, Pakistanis, Ethiopians, Indonesians, Filipinos, Egyptians, Nepalese and Sri Lankans (Times of Oman, 2015). This data reveals that Oman houses a mix of multi-cultures in one roof, a country that is highly heterogeneous in demographics despite the tight preservation of the Islamic heritage.

Part of the objectives of the GCC is the strict implementation of localization policy (termed "Omanization" in Oman) among the states to give employment priority for the citizens of the state and slowly withdraw dependence from foreign labor (Swales, Al Said & Al Fahdi, 2012, p.357). However, the data from NCSI demonstrates that the country still rests heavily on expatriates to maintain economic functions despite stringent Omanization measures.

Employing young Omanis to speed up the rate of Omanization may take time before it can be fully realized. Kuehn & Al Busaidi (2000) compared the values and attitudes of Omanis and expatriate workers. According to the study, Omanis displayed negative reactions to increase work demand and overtime and expressed willingness to leave their present job. Expatriates on the other hand are more practical in their standpoint where remaining committed to their work is the only way to stay in Oman. In another study by Swales, et al (2012, p.364-365), both private and public sectors expressed that work ethics need to be strengthened among young Omanis through proper education and training especially on the aspect of attendance, organizational commitment, satisfactory performance, delivery of quality outputs, reliability and caring attitude in customer service.

Spite of the enormous effort of the government toward Omanization, there is a continued preference among private companies of foreign over local labor primarily because of practice of stronger work ethics among expatriates (Swales, et al, 2012, p.361). Foreign labor is perceived as indispensable to maintain vigor and competitiveness in the field of entrepreneurship (Kuehn & Al Busaidi, 2000; Swales, et al, 2012, p.361). Omanis are not risk-takers and still rely on the expertise of the expatriates (Mujtaba et al, 2009, p.185).

Kuehn & Al Busaidi (2000) highlighted that competence, regardless of nationality, should be the basis for hiring for competitive organizations. They further emphasized that Omanization should foster the growth of organizational culture that breeds and supports Omanis and expatriates alike.

### III. Cultural Diversity: Challenge to Filipino Nurses

Culture shock is a common occurrence to anyone who is exposed to a new culture. In a study by Rajesakar & Renaud (2013, p.144), culture shock is one of the first challenges that expatriates experience upon arriving to their host countries. Unfamiliarity, ethnocentricity and inflexibility or failure to adapt with the existing culture, are the main factors leading to culture shock. Unfamiliarity or the lack of knowledge and orientation to the culture of the host country is the major cause where people usually associate something different to something wrong (p.157); ethnocentricity is the personal belief that one's culture is superior over the culture of the host country (pp.144-145); and, adapting to a new culture is usually a difficult, long and painful process (p.157). Of the categories of culture shock, differences in culture and religion are the crucial disputes that cause gap among people (p.157). The incompatible differences that transpire between Christians and Muslims are widely documented that has caused chaos, disparities and difficulties in patching the two religions in the world (p.157). Profound misunderstandings occur because human behavior is largely dictated by religious associations.

The struggles that a Filipino nurse need to endure in leaving her home country are painfully wide and varied. She needs to muster her courage in choosing and deciding wisely because moving out of her comfort zone means leaving the familiar for the unfamiliar. It means taking risks, enduring social isolation from family, friends and loved ones, and dealing with a new culture that may completely be different from one's own orientation (Slote, 2011, p.181). These struggles

may particularly be compounded for most Filipino nurses as they work in a Muslim country that is entirely different from the culture, values and tradition of the bigger population of the Philippines. The likelihood of experiencing unnecessary apprehension and tension may surface as they leave the Philippines carrying with them a Westernized set of knowledge and expertise and arriving in a healthcare system that is heavily influenced by Islamic traditional practices and cultural norms. The provision of a culturally-centered nursing care and a diversified workforce may be new experiences to an arriving Filipino nurse.

Brown & Busman (2003, pp.351-352) explored the factors affecting standards of practice among expatriate healthcare workforce in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, an Arab-Islamic-rooted country whose healthcare system is heavily influenced by culture and religion. It was predominantly expressed by most of the participants that KSA follows an authoritative rather than collaborative form of decision-making where the highest regard are given to doctors as source of authority. When asked of the factors affecting their standards of practice, the three most common themes that emerged were professional education and training from home countries, previous work experiences and continuous professional development provided by their departments/ institutions in KSA. Further, the participants rely primarily on the professional bodies from their respective countries, followed, in order of ranking, by the internet, books and journals, their departments and peers as sources of standards of care. Putting emphasis on KSA as a country that embraced a culturally-diversified workforce, the authors stressed on the essentiality that health care management should standardize the quality of care by looking into standards of practices accorded by their foreign workers. There is also a need to review the recruitment process looking into employer-employee fit and assess personal characteristics of job applicants to thrive in a transcultural setting. Further importance is placed on the orientation process given to their foreign workers to address their needs and ease their adjustment process in working in a relatively culturally-varied situation.

### IV. Acculturation and Job Satisfaction of Filipino Nurses

Acculturation is a two-way process where one successfully adapts to the culture of the host country while not disowning the culture of the home country (Alba & Nee, 1997 & Berry, 2003 as cited by Ea, Griffin, L'Eplattenier, Fitzpatrick, 2008, p.47). Degree of acculturation can affect levels of job satisfaction. In a study conducted by Ea, et al (2008, p.49-50) of Filipino nurses' job satisfaction and acculturation in America, it was found that the participants have a moderate level of job satisfaction and have successfully adjusted with the culture of America becoming English-proficient and adopting major cultural norms and traditional practices of their current host country. In fact, the study revealed that the participants are more accustomed with the culture of the host country than that of their home country. The positive findings on acculturation can be highly associated with their age, length of stay in USA averaging to 15.5 years and length of nursing practice in USA with average of 15 years. The positive job satisfaction of the participants can be associated with factors such as high income, level of education and length of stay and practice in USA. Moreover, all of the participants are members of the Philippine Nurses Association of America (PNAA) which may also affect their level of job satisfaction as they demonstrate strong professional commitment. More importantly, the findings indicate that positive acculturation influences job satisfaction positively. The findings echoes a potent implication for future healthcare human resource managers who intend to employ Filipino nurses to operate a reliable acculturation programs to ease the adjustment process of employees to a relatively new health care system as well as new members of the present society.

De Castro, Gee & Takeuchi (2008, p.37) studied the relationship of job dissatisfaction and physical and psychological health among migrant Filipino workers. The results showed that job dissatisfaction resulted to higher levels of psychological distress and poor physical health conditions. The authors emphasized that migrant Filipino workers, though they are underrepresented and considered a minority group, left their home country essentially for employment; thus, their levels of job satisfaction should be given importance and not undervalued by their employers.

Identifying and improving the acculturation and job satisfaction of Filipino nurses in the Sultanate of Oman has many far-reaching advantages. Firstly, knowledge on their level of acculturation and job satisfaction exposes potential problem areas that necessitate attention and solution by the administration. Secondly, a satisfied nurse is a healthy and productive nurse. Thus, ensuring their acculturation and satisfaction fortifies their professional acumen that contributes largely to the advancement of health care outcomes in their respective institutions. Lastly, higher level of acculturation and job satisfaction is related to stronger organizational commitment. Ensuring successful acculturation and high level of job satisfaction decreases the likelihood of early or fast turnover hence relieving global nursing shortage.

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